Nevada Operations Office News

National Nuclear Security Administration

News Media Contact:
LaTomya Glass, 702-295-3521

For Immediate Release
June 03, 2002

Oboe 9 Subcritical Experiment Announcement

Oboe 9, a Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory subcritical experiment, is scheduled for June 05, 2002, at the Nevada Test Site.

The experiment is designed to answer questions related to material properties of plutonium. The scientific data produced from these experiments supports the National Nuclear Security Administration's Stockpile Stewardship Program to maintain the safety and reliability of the United States nuclear weapons stockpile without conducting underground nuclear tests.

The Oboe 7 subcritical experiment conducted on December 13, 2001, was announced as the last experiment in the Oboe series. However, scientists have since determined there is a need to conduct at least one additional experiment in the series to collect data.

Subcritical experiments are conducted in the U1a complex, 85 miles northwest of Las Vegas. This complex is a safe and secure environment that provides scientists with a laboratory type setting 960 feet below the earth's surface.

Oboe experiments have been conducted in expendable containment vessels, allowing scientists to reuse the same alcove.

Subcritical experiments, while using nuclear material, do not create a critical mass. Therefore no self-sustaining, or critical, nuclear chain reaction occurs. Without this "chain-reaction" there is no nuclear explosion.

The last subcritical experiment conducted at the Nevada Test Site was *Vito*, conducted February 14, 2002, by Los Alamos National Laboratory. The last Lawrence Livermore subcritical experiment was *Oboe 7* on December 13, 2001. To date 16 subcritical experiments have been conducted at the Nevada Test Site.